

Methadone

Effective Aug. 14, Food & Drug Administration (FDA) changed its regulations to permit the use of methadone for all pregnant addicts regardless of age or prior addiction history, who are otherwise eligible for treatment. A medical director must certify the pregnancy & say such treatment is justified.

FDA says recent evidence shows that if methadone is taken away from a pregnant woman, especially in the last 3 months of pregnancy, the unborn infant may suffer. Within 6 weeks after the pregnancy ends, the doctor would make an evaluation as to whether the woman should remain on methadone or be detoxified.

Details—*Federal Register*: Aug. 14, page 34110.

Food stamps

Oct. 6 is deadline for comments on Agriculture Dept.'s alternate proposals for computing food stamp allotments. Agriculture is proposing these plans to comply with the U.S. Court of Appeals' June 12 ruling, which said the present plan is illegal because, among other reasons, Agriculture failed to provide substantially all food stamp users a nutritionally adequate diet. Agriculture was given 120 days to come up with alternate plans. [See CONSUMER NEWS: July 1].

Proposals are based on the July 1975 cost of the Thrifty Food Plan, instead of the Economy Food Plan—the plan that coupon allotments are now based upon. Thrifty Food Plan contains more meat, poultry & fish & less dry beans, potatoes & grain products than the Economy Food Plan.

Highlights of the proposed 3 alternative plans are:

- First proposal would take into consideration the age & sex composition of a family unit. This method of computing an allotment could, & in some cases, would, result in a decrease in coupon allotments because Agriculture averages the allotments for a family unit. With this proposal, allotments for a 2-family household could vary:

Mother, age 21	\$44
Child, age 2	24
	\$68
Mother, age 40	\$ 44
Son, age 16	56
	\$100

(Present plan allows a flat \$90 allotment for a family of 2, regardless of age & sexes. Proposal would reduce allotment of first family by \$22 & would increase allotment of second family by \$10.)

- Second proposal is the same as above except: If the old allotment is higher than the individualized allotment, no 2-unit family unit (i.e., mother & 2-year-old-child) would get less than \$90, but the mother & 16-year-old son would get \$100.

(Under the first 2 proposals, all households would receive a coupon allotment equivalent to 100% of the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan.)

- Third proposal would raise allotments for all household sizes. A 2-unit family would get a \$92 allotment regardless of the sex & age composition. This is just like the existing plan except that the amount is higher across the board.

Details—*Federal Register*: Sept. 19, page 43404. CONSUMER NEWS: July 1. Send comments to Jack O. Nichols, Acting Director, Food Stamp Division, Food & Nutrition Service, Agriculture Dept., Washington, DC 20250.

Note: Agriculture has asked for a 90-day extension for the deadline for comments on these proposals.

Public interest mailing list

Last month, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) started a weekly mailing of information about FCC actions to a limited number of public interest groups. These actions include summaries of rulemaking proposals, notices of hearings & other actions involving public participation. Purpose of this new procedure is to insure that a representative cross-section of public interest groups has an opportunity to comment on FCC proceedings.

A public interest group may be considered for inclusion on the mailing list by providing the following information:

- Name, address & telephone number of organization.
- Average number of members.
- Purpose of organization.
- Geographical scope—local, national or international.
- Subject matters of interest.

Individual consumers may also be added to the mailing list by submitting names, addresses & justification for receiving the material.

Send requests in writing to Public Information Office, Federal Communications Commission, 1919 M St. NW, Washington, DC 20554. Details—*Federal Register*: Aug. 15, page 34461.

Over-the-counter drugs

Oct. 28 is deadline for submissions of additional or supplemental information to Food & Drug Administration's (FDA) over-the-counter (OTC), or nonprescription, drug panels. FDA is reviewing all OTC drug products—also called patent medicine—for human use that are currently used in the US to determine their safety & effectiveness.

FDA needs ingredient data on a wide variety of OTC products, such as remedies for blemishes, chapped skin, cold sores, corns, itching, poison ivy, wrinkles, hangovers, menstrual cramps, overweight & smoking. A more detailed list of examples & categories of products & ingredients for which information is being requested is included in Aug. 27 *Federal Register*. Manufacturers & others who have already sent material to the panels do not have to resubmit, but they may supplement their material.

Details—*Federal Register*: Aug. 27, page 38179. CONSUMER NEWS: Jan. 15, 1972. Send material to Food & Drug Administration, Bureau of Drugs, Division of OTC Drug Evaluation (HFD-510), 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, Md. 20852.

Variable mortgage payments

Housing & Urban Development Dept. (HUD) is asking mortgagees & consumers for new ideas on mortgage payment plans, rather than the present straight mortgage plans, where the monthly payments remain the same.

These new mortgage payment plans would implement a section of the Housing & Community development Act of 1975 that provides for an experimental financing program. Under this program, HUD is authorized "to insure innovative mortgage instruments with amortization plans which correspond to anticipated variations in family income."

HUD would like to receive mortgage plan ideas by Nov. 1.

Purpose of proposing new payment plans is to help consumers buy homes based on their anticipated income. HUD thinks consumers could work out an arrangement where their mortgage payments are less per month at the beginning of the loan than later on—when they expect to make more money and be better able to make higher payments. For example, for the first 10

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years after buying a house, the monthly payments could be one amount—perhaps covering only the interest on the loan—and for the remainder of the loan period, payments could be higher—probably covering principal & interest. The payment plan would be decided at the time the mortgage is negotiated.

Interest rate would not change. Congress specifically prohibited HUD from insuring mortgages with variable interest rates.

Details—*Federal Register*: Aug. 18, page 34625. Send proposed plans to Office of Policy & Program Analysis & Development, Housing & Urban Development Dept., Washington, DC 20410.

Vinyl chloride

Nov. 3 is deadline for comments on Food & Drug Administration's (FDA) proposal to ban some plastic food packaging & other food-contact materials made with vinyl chloride (VC).

VC, ordinarily a gas, has been shown to cause a rare form of liver cancer when inhaled by humans, & tests on animals suggest that it might also cause cancer by ingestion.

FDA says it has evidence that residues from some forms of the VC packages—such as the semi-rigid packages containing lunch meats, cheeses & other foods & bottles containing such items as vegetable oil & mouthwashes—migrate into food. In addition to the above, plastics applied to fresh citrus fruits to retain freshness would be prohibited. However, no such migration has been found from the flexible & generally thinner VC plastics—such as the film-type wraps used to cover raw meats & poultry. FDA is not proposing the prohibition of thin plastics, gaskets, cap liners & tubing.

FDA is also not proposing—at this time, at least—any restriction on the use of VC plastics in water pipes, but additional studies will be conducted.

FDA plans to make decisions at a later date on the use of VC plastics in the cosmetic, drug & medical devices fields.

Details—*Federal Register*: Sept. 3, page 40529; May 17, 1973, page 12931. CONSUMER REGISTER: July 1, 1973. Send comments to Hearing Clerk, Food & Drug Administration, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20582.

Country hams

Nov. 4 is deadline for comments on Agriculture Dept.'s proposal to set a standard for products labeled "Country Ham," "Country Style Ham," "Country Pork Shoulder," "Country Style Pork Shoulder," "Dry Cured Ham" & "Dry Cured Pork Shoulder."

This is the third time Agriculture has proposed standards for these pork products. (Other proposals came out in July 1971 & July 1972). Comments on the second proposal were generally favorable except for questioning the time period necessary for curing the meat & maximum temperature to which those products should be subjected during drying & aging.

Agriculture says that years ago, especially in rural areas, farmers prepared meat during the colder months so the curing process would be well underway before the arrival of warm weather. The preparation involved the use of salt & other products & the natural removal of moisture. This process gave "country" products their characteristic flavors, odors, textures & appearance & also killed any possible trichinae.

With modern refrigeration, preservation of these products

is no longer dependent on climate & curing with salt, but Agriculture proposes to establish minimum requirements for "country" products so that modern preservation will approximate the flavor & texture of traditional products.

Some hams & pork shoulders are still prepared in a way similar to the country cured products, but with shorter drying or curing times. Agriculture proposes that these products be called "Dry Cured" ham or shoulders.

Under the proposed standard, "country" products:

- Would have a salt content of at least 4%.
- Would have a minimum shrinkage of 18% (from the weight of fresh meat).
- Would have a 70-day minimum period for curing, salt equalization & drying for "Country Hams" (50 days for "Country Shoulder"). Total time for "Dry Cured Hams" would be 55 days, & total time for "Dry Cured Shoulders" would be 40 days.

Details—*Federal Register*: Sept. 5, page 41139; July 13, 1972, page 13717; July 17, 1971, page 13273. CONSUMER REGISTER: Aug. 15, 1972. CONSUMER NEWS: August 1971. Send comments to Hearing Clerk, Agriculture Dept., Washington, DC 20250.

Bike carriers

Dec. 2 is deadline for comments on National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) request for comments & information on hazards resulting from bicycle carriers attached to cars.

Public Interest Research Group asked NHTSA to regulate bicycle carriers—and NHTSA is now considering a rule which would:

- Require all mounting hardware to be installed on a car in a way to reduce injuries to pedestrians.
- Reduce or eliminate sharp edges on carriers.
- Prohibit bicycle support arms from extending beyond a specified distance from the trunk of the car when the bicycle is not being carried.
- Require labels on carriers warning against installing carriers on front of cars.

NHTSA wants information on:

- How many deaths & injuries have resulted from bicycle carriers while car is either moving or parked.
- Problems associated with current designs for bicycle carriers, such as difficulty of installation or ability to hold bike steady.
- Information on how many bicycle carriers are sold, how much they cost & how many manufacturers there are.
- Insurance rates & coverage of cars equipped with bike carriers.

Details—*Federal Register*: Sept. 3, page 40537. Send comments on proposed rule & information about carriers to Docket Section, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Washington, D.C. 20590.

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For you

These forms are for you to use, if you wish, in commenting on any Federal agency proposal summarized in CONSUMER REGISTER. Of course, if you cannot get your comments on the front & back of a form, feel free to continue your comments on additional paper.

Send comment forms to addresses listed in the summaries.

CONSUMER NEWS is publishing these forms in cooperation with Food & Drug Administration (FDA).

Rate Register

Planes

• On Sept. 15, Council on Wage & Price Stability (CWPS) said Civil Aeronautics Board's (CAB) proposal [CONSUMER REGISTER: Aug.1] to let airlines experiment with deregulation is unnecessary. CWPS said CAB "does not require further information in order to be able to pursue a constructive course of modernizing regulation, whether in the form of an experiment or otherwise." CWPC recommends that CAB move toward lessening of regulation in all markets on a system-wide industry basis.

• On Sept. 16, Transportation Dept. endorsed Civil Aeronautics Board's (CAB) proposal on airlines deregulation, but suggested that the experiment be broader than CAB's proposal. Transportation's specific suggestions were:

1. Experimental services should be approved for a minimum of 5 years, & CAB should state at the outset that, if successful, they would be permanent.

2. CAB should give preference to airlines who propose innovative fares, such as "no frills."

3. CAB should process all applications for experimental services within 6 months.

Mail

• On Sept. 14, Postal Service (PS) made permanent the "temporary" increases that were recommended to the Postal Rate Commission (PRC) on Sept. 25, 1973. The "temporary" rates have been in effect since March, 1974.

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Clip this form, fill in blanks, write your comments & mail to agency noted in CONSUMER REGISTER item.

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Rate Register

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Although these permanent rates are basically the same as the temporary rates, certain first class rates were reduced & some parcel post rates went up. [See RATE REGISTER: Sept. 15] Details—*Federal Register*: Sept. 12, page 42460.

• On Sept. 19, PS proposed another postal increase, which it plans to put into effect shortly after Christmas—again on a temporary basis—if PRC does not take any action within 90 days. Proposed rates represent an average increase of 26% over the present rates.

Following chart shows highlights of new & proposed postage changes:

Category	Present (Permanent Sept. 14) ¹	Proposed (Temporary after Christmas) ²
First Class	10¢ oz.	13¢
Each additional letter ounce	9¢ ³	11¢
Postcards	7¢ each ⁴	10¢ each
Air mail	13¢ oz. ⁵	17¢ ⁶
Air postcard	11¢ each	14¢ each
Second class		Up 22%
Third class		Up 23.9%
Parcel Post		Up 10.1% ⁷
Special service & int'l rates		34%–100% ⁸

¹ Recommended by PRC & approved by PS.

² Rates as recommended to PRC. If PRC does not act within 90 days, PS will put these rates into effect on a "temporary" basis.

³ Represents a reduction of 1¢ per oz. from the old "temporary" rates.

⁴ Represents reduction of 1¢ from old "temporary" rates.

⁵ Not needed after Oct. 10. PS plans to treat all first class mail with service equal to or better than present air mail. Air mail stamps & cards can be exchanged for ordinary postage at post offices or used as regular postage.

⁶ Although PS requested increasing airmail stamp to 17¢, it would be unnecessary to buy any air mail stamps for domestic letters after Oct. 10. See footnote 5, above.

⁷ This represents an actual 16% increase over the fourth class rates that were in effect from March 1974 until Sept. 14, 1975. PRC set fourth class rates about 5% higher than PS requested.

⁸ See proposal by PS, below.

• Oct. 18 is deadline for comments on Postal Service's (PS) proposal to increase the fees for special services on international & domestic mail. These services include registered mail, certified mail, insurance, money orders, special delivery, special handling, CODs, return receipts & address correction forms. Details—*Federal Register*: Sept. 19, page 43232 & 43233. Send comments to Director, Office of Mail Classification, Rates & Classification Dept., Postal Service, Washington, DC 20260.

